

To whom this may concern,

My name is Jennifer Kendall, I am here today to talk about bill number 6380. My son, Cooper Kendall is legally blind. Cooper was diagnosed with Occular Albinism at 3 months old, he is now 14 and a freshman in high school. We have been receiving services from BESB since Cooper was diagnosed. Occular Albinism is the lack of pigment in the retina, it significantly reduces a Cooper's vision and makes him very sensitive to light, it also has made it difficult for Cooper to navigate stairs and curbs, this is related to depth perception. When Cooper was about to enter pre-school it was his BESB teacher Cindy Reed Brown who was there at the playground taping the stairs to the slide so that he could climb them and participate in recess with all of the other kids it was also Cindy who took him through the cafeteria so that he would know where all the food was she did the same on the school bus so that he could start being independent and take the bus, like everyone else. If I remember correctly she also rode the bus with him for a week. She had the insight way back then to get these things started to make him the independent young man that he is today. When you think of a disabled child you may not necessarily think of someone like Cooper because to look at him you do not see his disability. That is where the importance of BESB comes in. As I mentioned they start at a very young age getting our children ready to be good functioning adults in our communities. Now that Cooper is a little bit older the services that are offered are irreplaceable. They help our children in ways that you and I would never think of, for example, Robbin Keating from BESB will take a group to the mall to school shop. By her doing this she is teaching our children with low vision how to pay with a debit card, how to use that machine that swipes the card, how to keep track and organize their money in their wallets, so that they do not accidentally give a 20 instead of a 10 dollar bill. I have not even mentioned the sports camps that they hold to give our children the confidence they need, without these programs many of our children would never have the chance to play any sports, the school districts do not have the knowledge or the means to assist these children, BESB allows for them to participate. Now that Cooper is approaching transition age, he will begin to be involved with the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) division of BESB. Within VR, Cooper will work with his college coordinator and counselor for work. Those counselors work directly with his teacher for the visually impaired and the education projects coordinator (Robbin Keating) to help develop the necessary skills for Cooper to be successful in transitioning to work and to college. The advantage of having his education needs (Children's Services) and his post-secondary needs (VR) in one agency is that two divisions can work together to help prepare Cooper to be successful. Both division understand the unique needs of children who have legal blindness. It is imperative that his VR counselor understand those unique needs. It is also a professional advantage that the two divisions can work side by side, collaborating to make the most effective and seamless transfer of services. I am also very concerned that if the Children's Services division gets relocated the State Dept. of Education will not understand the unique need of Cooper's disability.

At BESB there is an agency director who is well versed in the education needs of children who are legally blind. I am very concerned about how the services will look for Cooper if the agency is divided and is led by a commissioner who does not know about the specialized needs of children who are blind.

I feel that without BESB as it is today the lives of our children will only get harder because services will be watered down and if you tell me they probably will not, well as a mother I cannot take that chance.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to listen to me and to take into serious consideration the true cost of changing the face of BESB.

Jennifer Kendall